

Seniors *Adopting* Seniors

Can a Person be “Too Old”
to Adopt?

**Behind
the Scenes
at OC:**

The Life-Saving Work
of the Helpline

2014
Companions Challenge
We Did It!

Something to Chew On

Dear Friends,

In 2014, the Our Companions family rallied like never before and we couldn't be more touched, proud and honored. There are countless examples of this dedication; allow us to highlight just a few.

First and foremost, there was the tremendous participation in the 2014 Companions Challenge! Our goal for 2014 was \$800,000, up from \$650,000 the year before – a sizeable increase. With more than 99% of our operations funded through donations, the fundraising stakes are high. And with two facilities, 15 full- and part-time employees, dozens of cats and dogs in our care – many of whom have special needs – and hundreds of people and animals depending on our various programs and services, those stakes have never been higher.

Knowing this goal was a stretch, likely just beyond our reach, we employed the Challenge as a means of galvanizing support. It worked.

We are so happy to report that we not only met the Challenge – procuring the \$100,000 in Challenge gifts – we exceeded our goal, raising nearly \$850,000. So many in the OC community sustained or even increased their contributions in 2014, and we were humbled by this generosity. And now we begin 2015 in a position of great strength, poised to help even more animals than ever before.

There are several other ways in which OC was championed in 2014. Throughout the year, countless members of the OC family donated desperately-needed items for the Sanctuary...from food to beds, to litter to cleaning materials and more – improving the quality of life for our homeless pets. And all of these donations represent items that we don't have to purchase, leaving those funds available for such things as medical bills, Sanctuary maintenance, Program Center upkeep, and program expansion.

Also in 2014, a record number of constituents agreed to include Our Companions in their estate plans. The Forever Home Society, which recognizes those who have made a provision for Our Companions in their estate plans, grew by 21%, and now boasts nearly 80 members. Thoughtful support of this nature ensures that Our Companions will be aiding pets in need for generations to come.

Lastly, we would like to recognize those who represent the backbone of Our Companions – our dedicated, tireless, selfless volunteers. Whether serving on the Board of Directors, the Advisory Board, a committee, training dogs, staffing the Helpline, making phone-a-thon calls, stuffing envelopes or rehabilitating homeless animals at the Ashford Sanctuary, our team of well over 300 volunteers makes everything we do possible. Their commitment to our mission is inspiring.

Donors, adopters and volunteers allow us to keep our bold promise, “to do the right thing for animals, regardless of the challenge or the cost.” We are so excited to continue on this journey and together we look forward to seeing what 2015 will bring.



Valerie

Valerie Friedman,
Board Chair



Susan Linker

Susan Linker,
Chief Executive Officer

About Our Companions News

Our Companions News is published three times per year by Our Companions Animal Rescue, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

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Seniors Adopting Seniors



Can a Person be “Too Old” to Adopt?

by Mary deManbey

When is a person “too old” to adopt a companion animal? Any person of a certain age who has ever thought about adopting an animal thinks about this question. If I adopt this animal who is so dependent on me, will he or she outlive me? If so, should I even be thinking about adopting?

The answer is a resounding yes. Studies have shown that caring for an animal brings new life to seniors, especially those who might otherwise be isolated and in need of companionship. Not only are there psychological benefits, but there are health benefits as well. Pet-owning seniors often utilize fewer medical services, follow health recommendations more closely and are less affected by stress in their lives. Having to care for a companion animal can also give order and structure – and even meaning – to a senior’s life.

While some animal shelters have denied seniors the right to adopt, out of concern that they may not be able to care for the animal, Our Companions’ philosophy is that the most important consideration is finding the right match, regardless of the age of either the animal or the potential owner.

“We always assess the pet’s needs first,” says Stephanie Montemerlo, Director of Programs for Our Companions. “For instance, some animals are more affectionate, some are more independent. So we look at the person’s lifestyle and what the adopter is looking for to see if it’s a right match.”

Stephanie says seniors make wonderful adopters, “because they’re home a lot, they may be retired, and their lives are stable. They have the time and the love to give to these animals.”

Regardless of how old an adopter is, Our Companions recommends that he/she designate a guardian for their pet just in case. “We just want to know that there is a person nearby – a friend or relative – who could care for their pet if they are no longer able to for health reasons,” notes Stephanie.

The perfect match for a senior may be a senior pet. There are many reasons why anyone, and seniors in particular, might want to consider adopting an older cat or dog, as opposed to a puppy or kitten:

- Adult dogs and cats don’t require as much supervision as younger pets;
- Adult dogs and cats are less destructive than kittens and puppies; and
- You’re saving a life – they are often the last ones to get adopted from shelters. Senior animals need you.

Probably one of the strongest reasons to adopt an older dog or cat is that you know what you’re getting. They come with their personality fully developed so you can better assess if the match is right for you.

Some would hesitate adopting a senior cat, but that’s just what Irene Moore did when she adopted Lucie from Our Companions. Irene, who is 94 years young, has always had cats, but when she said goodbye to her last cat, she thought her pet-owning days were over. When she met Lucie, a petite eight-year-old cat, she couldn’t resist.

“She’s a doll,” Irene says. “She loves to play, and she sleeps with me at night. She’s such a sweet little thing.” Irene likes the fact that Lucie is an indoor cat who really enjoys being indoors, and she attributes this to Lucie’s being a senior cat.

Because of her advanced age, Irene hesitated to adopt but when she heard Our Companions had a return policy, she was encouraged. She did worry about who might take care of Lucie in her absence, but to her relief, her daughter-in-law agreed to be Lucie’s guardian.

Jane Viviano adopted Nick from Our Companions “in the nick of time,” she laughs. Nick, a beagle/whippet mix, was a high-strung seven-year-old dog who had been given up by “empty nesters” and then again by a family with young children. Although Nick had arthritis and had been on Xanax to treat the anxiety he experi-



Irene and Lucie sharing a special moment.



Adorable Lucie.

enced after losing his family twice, this didn’t deter Jane.

“I’ve always adopted seniors. They deserve a bed of their own where they can live out their lives feeling loved and wanted, not as castaways because they are old. Being in a shelter with all the aches and pains that go along with being old really takes its toll. They appreciate being adopted and have a lot of love to give; you know what you’re getting and you don’t have to train them,” says Jane.

Jane says because she’s a senior herself, she appreciates what senior animals experience in a noisy environment. “Seniors like to be in a quiet environment, they like to be close to you. Nick has become very calm with me, and is happy to just be loved for who he is.”

Continued on page 4

Because Jane lives alone, Nick has become a wonderful companion for her. "You get so much back, just knowing that someone is there waiting for you when you walk through the door. He gets me up in the morning. We have this routine, and even if I want to go back to bed and put the covers over my head, I get up, and we walk for half an hour in the fresh air."

The possibility that Nick may outlive her has crossed Jane's mind, but she has let her children know that he would need to be cared for. An added reassurance is that Our Companions has a policy of taking back adopted animals should owners no longer be able to care for them and in the absence of a designated caregiver.

The benefits far outweigh any drawbacks, she observes. "He makes me laugh. Most importantly, he keeps me young."



Nick (formerly Neekos) and Jane showing off their training skills.

The Best Gift I Ever Received

My Aunt Ming was the original Auntie Mame. She flew planes, rode horses on a dude ranch, was a talented illustrator, owned a clothing store, was an interior decorator and Arthur Murray dance instructor, and married a man 27 years younger than she. It surprised all of us when he died before she did.

At age 80, even though she was still vibrant, she found herself alone and isolated from the world she once knew. When she adopted a kitten with huge tiger paws, I had my reservations, but I agreed to be Tigger's guardian. Tigger became her constant companion and comforter, so when she died five years later, he was one sad cat.

Today, Tigger is a senior and he is growing old with me. He sits on my lap, shares my pillow at night, and sits next to me on the piano bench when I play his favorite Chopin pieces. I know my Aunt Ming is looking down on us and smiling, because she knows he is the best gift I ever received.

- Mary deManbey

Meet these special friends waiting for their forever home...



Zoey

Zoey is a very special gal – she's a typical Cocker Spaniel, in that she LOVES to play ball and loves her toys! Camping is a favorite activity too!! And did we mention cuddling? She is eight years old and weighs 35 lbs. She has never lived with other animals so she would prefer to be an only pet. She can be trusted to have free run of the home when she is left alone but she is crate-trained too. Please call Our Companions at 860-242-9999 or e-mail daryl@ourcompanions.org about this absolutely sweet gal!



Dillon

Dillon is one hunky guy! He is quite the charmer and very sweet too. Dillon can take some time to get to know people, but once he trusts you, he wants to be your best buddy. He is absolutely worth taking the time to get to know because once you do he is a lovable and purring lap cat, and who doesn't love that? Dillon also has a bit of an adventurous streak and would enjoy some outdoor time each day; perhaps he could join you for gardening or walking with a harness? For more information, please contact Stephanie at 860-242-9999 ext. 302 or Stephanie@ourcompanions.org.

Behind the Scenes at OC: The Life-Saving Work of the Helpline



by Julie Stankiewicz

Once a month in the conference room of the Valerie Friedman Program Center, the dedicated group of volunteers and staff that comprise the Our Companions Helpline meets over dinner to discuss its current cases – sharing challenges and offering advice, as well as celebrating their successes. The Helpline originated in 2005, when Our Companions CEO Susan Linker asked two volunteers, Stephanie Montemerlo and Sue King, to return phone calls the organization was receiving about cats and dogs in need of help.

“I had been searching for a rescue [group] that had stability and a sound plan to rescue and place animals,” says Sue King. “Then I attended one of Susan Linker’s volunteer orientations. That was it. At that point I volunteered to help in whatever capacity was needed.”

At that time, Our Companions did not have many of its current programs, and the volunteers typically referred callers to other organizations. As programs were developed in the ensuing years, meetings and trainings most often took place in Susan Linker’s home, and adoptions occurred in private homes and even public parking lots. Nine years later, the 14 volunteers and three staff members of the Helpline answer more than 4,000 calls and emails each year. Trainings, client and volunteer meetings, and adoptions now occur at the Valerie Friedman Program Center or at the Ashford Sanctuary. These professional settings, as well as the Helpline’s now-streamlined processes and high volume of cases, show no evidence of such humble beginnings. What started as a small-scale effort has become a comprehensive, multi-faceted program that has saved thousands of lives.

The Helpline provides numerous services to the community, including help with the re-homing of pets, pet adoptions, low-cost spay and neuter, feral cat colony management, and behavioral resources. Helpline volunteers choose to specialize in one or more types of calls depending upon their interests and the current needs of the organization. For example, the



OC volunteers organize a feral cat shelter-building party.

responsibilities of a volunteer who specializes in cat adoptions would include some basic marketing for each of their assigned cats (writing descriptions on Petfinder, drafting write-ups for posters, etc.), returning calls and emails from potential adopters who have expressed interest in those cats, screening adoption applications, managing the face-to-face adoptions, and following up with adopters.

Calls from the public are taken at the Program Center. Each day, Stephanie Montemerlo, now Our Companions Director of Programs, distributes the callback assignments to the Helpline volunteers, via email, and the volunteers return the calls from home.

“The Helpline volunteers are really on the front lines of our program work, and what they do makes a huge difference in the lives of animals,” says Stephanie.

The unique ways in which the Helpline works are beneficial both to the people seeking assistance as well as to the animals involved.

For example, individuals looking for a new home for a pet they can no longer keep are strongly encouraged to keep the pet until Our Companions can help them find a new home. This protocol prevents animals from entering the shelter system unnecessarily. Members of the Helpline also work with pet owners on correcting unwanted behaviors that may have prompted their call in the first place. Often this results in their deciding not to give up their animal after all.

In the case of a dog with behavioral issues, “There may be a way through training where they can help the dog become a better part of their family,” says Daryl Carbone, Helpline volunteer and head dog trainer at OC’s Canine College.

Sue King is currently working with a man who doesn’t want to give up his dog but is “stuck for answers.” She hopes that by providing behavioral assistance, she might convince the man to keep his beloved friend. “When I can help make that change – it doesn’t get any better than that,” she says.

Continued on page 6

When an owner cannot keep a beloved pet, it is a source of great comfort to be included in the re-homing process and to have the opportunity to meet the animal's new family.

"For most people, it's heartbreaking to give up a pet, and doing it this way eases that challenge somewhat," says Stephanie.

The ways in which the Helpline supports feral cat colonies further demonstrates Our Companions' commitment to partnering with the community. Efforts focus on educating and encouraging community members to take a share of responsibility for animals in need. In contrast to typical trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs in which organizations trap cats and return them to their original location, Our Companions teaches caregivers how to trap cats themselves and provides the tools they need to do it. In addition to classes and equipment, Our Companions provides spay/neuter vouchers, food assistance, and shelters for feral cats. By dispensing the educational tools to trap cats, as well as the resources needed to care for them, Our Companions is able to help many more feral cats than would be possible otherwise.

Sue King continues to work for the Helpline nearly a decade after it began. "Taking calls and offering help has given me the opportunity to make a difference in so many lives," she says.

One of Sue's favorite memories is of "Happy," a blue 10-year-old Doberman Pinscher who was living in a third-floor apartment. Happy's owner loved him, but felt she was no longer able to help him up and down the stairs for his daily walks. He had been born deaf, had learned sign language, and through it all was a very happy guy. Thanks to Sue's dedication, Happy found a perfect home that was able to meet all his needs.

It is impressive to think that what started as a small effort – two volunteers answering telephone calls – has transformed into a program that has changed and saved so many lives, and continues to grow each year.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a volunteer for the Helpline, please contact Stephanie at 860-242-9999, ext. 303.



The final shelter design is clearly kitty approved!



Simon in his new home.

OC's Forever Home Society

By including Our Companions in your estate plans, you will become a member of our *Forever Home Society*. Giving is one of life's greatest satisfactions, especially when you know that your gift will improve the lives of deserving animals for generations to come.

Below, is a current listing of the *Forever Home Society* members – we hope you will consider adding your name to this list.



If you have already included Our Companions in your estate plans, please let us know so we can welcome you as a member of the *Forever Home Society*.

To learn more, please contact Susan Linker at 860-242-9999, ext 301 or email SusanL@OurCompanions.org.

If you wish to name Our Companions in your will or estate plans, we should be named as:

Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, DBA Our Companions Animal Rescue

Legal Address:
P.O. Box 956, Manchester, CT 06045

Tax ID number: 41-2047734

Anonymous	Ms. Heather Dennis and Mr. Kevin Gillespie	Ms. Dottie Kern	Ms. Barbara Ruben and Ms. June Roy
Ms. Elizabeth Aaronsohn	Ms. Christine Durrer	Mrs. Gretchen LaBau	Ms. Karen Scucchi-Carr
Ms. Mary Jean Agostini	Ms. Barbara J. Erskine	Ms. Estelle Langlois	Ms. Lorraine Semnoski
Mrs. Janet Bailey	Ms. Paula Fischer	Mr. Mitchell and Mrs. Susan Linker	Mr. Charles and Mrs. Chris Shivery
Dr. George and Mrs. Jennifer Barrows	Mr. Marvin Fried	Ms. Mary Mansfield	Ms. Joanne Singer
Mrs. Deborah Batten	Ms. Valerie Friedman	Mr. Robert and Mrs. Susan Mason	Ms. Vi Smalley
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Ms. Christina (Tina) Davies	Ms. Kathy Hucks	Mr. Robert and Mrs. Judith W.M. Prohaska	Mr. Albert Toro
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Ms. Mary June Day	Ms. Lisa Ireland *		Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Kim Zimmermann

GIVING

We Did It!

Thanks to You, We Met the 2014 Companions Challenge!

In 2014, \$100,000 was on the line – but once again, you came through for us. As you probably know, Our Companions is funded almost entirely through donations. These donations fund all of our work at the Ashford Sanctuary and Valerie Friedman Program Center. Each year, we must raise these funds in order to continue our important work. Early in 2014, a small group of supporters infused fresh energy into this process, promising to donate \$100,000 to Our Companions Animal Rescue if we could raise \$700,000 by December 31, 2014. We named this the “Companions Challenge” and enthusiastically spread the word.

Thanks to your extraordinary outpouring of support and generosity, the **2014 Companions Challenge** was a success! We not only met – we **EXCEEDED** – our goal and, in doing so, procured an **additional \$100,000**, enabling us to help even more animals – who have nowhere else to turn – than ever before.

We are truly overwhelmed with gratitude and cannot wait to share with you how your support is saving and changing lives in the New Year. On behalf of the staff, volunteers, Board of Directors and the people and pets we serve, thank you!

Happy New Year!

\$100,000
Challenge



From Humble Beginnings

Our Companions was founded in 2002. The first ten years of our existence involved demolishing chicken coops to clear the way for the Ashford Sanctuary, establishing a base of volunteers and donors, and working from any makeshift space we could find, including basements, parking lots and spare rooms. In the last two years, we've built the first two phases of our Ashford Sanctuary and established the 6,000-square-foot Valerie Friedman Program Center to house our many successful and growing programs.

For those who have been with us through these many years, we thank you for believing in the dream. For those who have joined us in recent years, or who are thinking about volunteering for OC in the future, we look forward to taking our dream to the next decade with your fresh energy and ideas.

In celebration of our many achievements, we wanted to share some photos from the "good old days."



Above: This area of massive chicken coops, where thousands of animals once suffered, is now the site of our Ashford Sanctuary.



Left: Inside view of the coops.

Through the Years...

2004

Senator Blumenthal (then Attorney General Blumenthal), speaking in Bushnell Park, shares the news of the future Ashford Sanctuary.





2008

Longtime volunteer, Sue King, at OC's first office in Susan Linker's spare room.



OC volunteer Jeannie Kitchens signing in members at our orientation, held in a church basement.



2009

Left: OC volunteer dog trainer Daryl with Rowdy, OC's longtime evaluation dog.

Right: OC's first vehicle, the Spay Wagon, picking up a load of cat food from a food drive hosted by Liberty Tax.



2010

Left: OC volunteer, Paul Johnson, who is now OC's Office Manager, in OC's first office, Susan's basement.

Right: OC volunteer trainers Deanna and Anne used to hold classes in parking lots before we had our Program Center.



Hey, It's OUR TURN to Get Adopted!

This was a banner year for Our Companions and with the expanded housing at the Ashford Sanctuary we were able to find wonderful homes for more animals than ever before. There are a few special animals at the Sanctuary, however, who have been waiting...and waiting... and waiting... for that perfect home. We'd love to introduce them to you and ask for your help in giving them what they deserve most – a forever home. Please email us at Helpline@OurCompanions.org or call 860-242-9999, for more information.



Charley & Sterling

Charley is a ten-month-old female kitten. She is sweet, playful and a ball of purring love. After having a session of kitten fun, she will crawl up on your lap to snuggle for a cat nap. One look into her eyes and it's hard not to fall in love with her! She gets along well with her fellow feline friend, Sterling, and is looking for a forever home to share with him.

Sterling is an irresistibly handsome two-year-old male gray tabby. He's very affectionate and likes to chatter, snuggle, sit on your lap, and play with interactive toys. Sterling will greet you when you walk through the door, give you a sweet blink, tell you all about his day...and basically melt your heart! He would love to be adopted with his BFF, Charley.



Samantha

Oh Samantha! This orange and white feline (of the diva variety) is approximately two years old. Samantha is not only super smart, but she's also sweet and extremely affectionate. If you are looking for a constant companion, she is the girl for you. Samantha likes to play with her toys and also spends a lot of time sunning herself in her Catio. And did we mention her "naptitude?" It's off the charts. She loves to sleep late in the morning and then will climb into your lap for another nap later on in the day. Wouldn't you love to curl up with Samantha?



Frankie

Frankie is a handsome two-year-old male cat, fully capable of stealing your heart! He is a very playful, loving boy who will keep you entertained with his endless energy. After playtime he will find his favorite spot and catch a nap before he's up and ready to go again. He gets along great with some of his younger friends like Ashley, who are able to keep up with his energy!



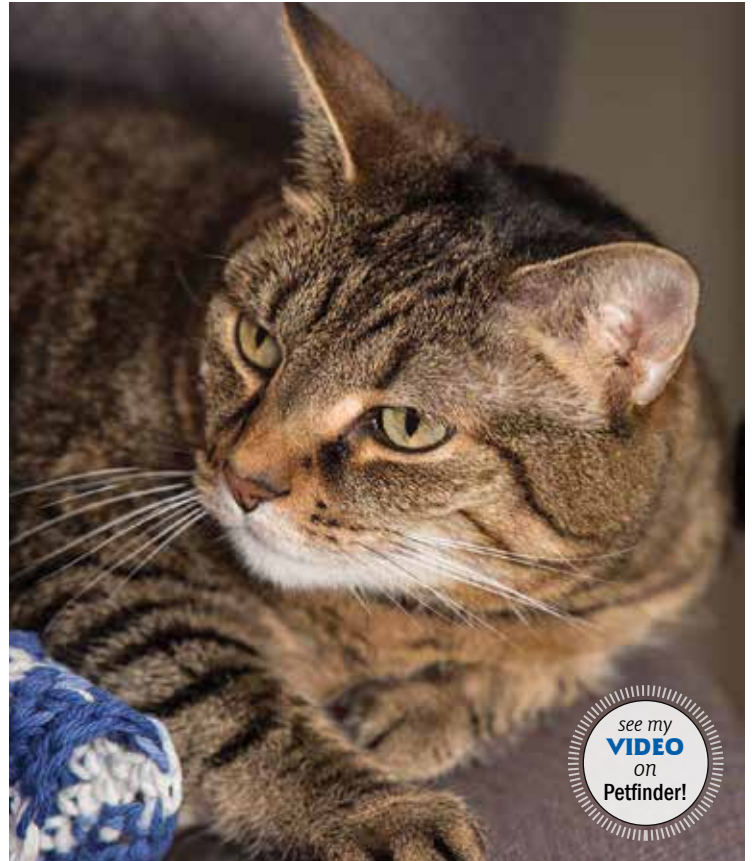
Aggie

Aggie is affectionate, alert, and spirited, and a big fan of walks, runs, squeaky toys and car rides! She has even learned to play ball by herself, by throwing the ball up and chasing it as it rolls away! She has earned many accolades, including Star Puppy in puppy class, Graduate of Level I Training, and a Canine Good Citizen's certificate. She is a sleek black gal with striking white markings and her favorite place is right next to you doing whatever you are doing! She is looking for an adult home where she can be the only pet.



Lucy

Lucy is waiting for you to come and meet her. This beautiful girl has been with us for a year now and, although she loves her life here, she's looking for her forever home. Lucy is a shy girl, so she'd prefer a quiet home where she can get plenty of exercise. She is about one year old, spayed, approximately 50 lbs., crate-trained and is the size of a small Lab. She knows the commands, "sit," "down," "leave it," and "wait," and is good at attention games. Having another confident dog in the home would be ideal for this pretty gal. She makes friends slowly (with both people and other dogs) but when she does, she loves to play...a lot! We hope that you will contact us to meet pretty Lucy.



Tabby

Tabby has it all! She is friendly, curious, and a wonderful companion. This beautiful tiger loves to be near her people. When happiest, she is sitting with or sleeping near her favorite person, day or night. She enjoys interactive dangly and feather toys, being brushed, and is a fun, lovable girl. She has lots of affection to share and wants to be your one and only.



Hera

Hera, thoughtful, gentle and athletic, came to us from Animal Control as a stray. She was scared and very shy, but she has made some human and canine friends at our Sanctuary, and we know she will be an amazing dog when someone like you gives her time to blossom.

Hera is approximately five years old, 45 lbs, and a German Shepherd/ Lab mix. She is an active girl who loves to run in the fields, dig deep in a sandbox, and chew her Nylabones with gusto. She also likes to relax on her dog bed or a favorite couch. Hera is looking for that special person or adult family to trust. She would prefer a quiet home, a fenced-in yard would be a plus, and lots of exercise, patience and love.

Special Gifts for the Ashford Sanctuary

Let's Party under the Perkin Fund Pavilion!

This year Our Companions was extremely fortunate to receive a generous donation from a private foundation called The Perkin Fund. The Perkin Fund had supported the first phase of construction at the Ashford Sanctuary and, more recently, graciously allowed us to apply for a grant to fund the construction of a much-needed outdoor pavilion.

The beautiful new pavilion provides the perfect gathering place for educational programs, community events and dog training sessions, and has quickly become the beloved centerpiece of our campus. We hope you will join us in showing our appreciation by attending a future outdoor event at the Perkin Fund Pavilion!



Volunteers gather to celebrate the Sanctuary's second birthday.



Feline Care Manager, Christine, hauls trash with a wagon.

It's Time to Ditch the Wagon!

The Mortensen Foundation has graciously awarded a grant to Our Companions to purchase a much-needed Club Car for the Sanctuary. As it happens, the Sanctuary's animal housing buildings, garage, dog park, hiking trails and parking lot are all sprawled over many acres. The amount of supplies needed for the animals is considerable and often very heavy to transport. Up until now, when moving supplies from place to place, we have utilized a hand-pulled cart which is inefficient and very physically difficult (we have gravel driveways and roads). At times this was even dangerous, as we had to pull the cart uphill in the snow and ice during the winter months.

Now we are able to more efficiently and safely move the heavy supplies around the Sanctuary on a daily basis, including large tools and other maintenance equipment. This acquisition also will enable us to more easily handle the landscaping and gardening needs on our 43-acre facility.

To these generous Foundations and all who make what we do at our Ashford Sanctuary possible, please accept a big tail-wagging thank you!



OC's new Club Car ready for action.

Baby, It's Cold Outside!

But it's toasty and warm snuggling on a couch at our Ashford Sanctuary – of course, you'll have to share your couch with the animals!

Each Saturday from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m., the Ashford Sanctuary is open to visitors for a tour of our facilities. Come visit and experience our Ashford Sanctuary, where transformations happen every day for animals who need a second chance at a happy life. While you're visiting, learn how you can become a part of our family of volunteers and supporters and meet the animals whose lives have been changed forever.

The Sanctuary provides a beautiful and cozy safe haven for homeless animals awaiting their permanent home, and is a welcoming and comfortable environment for visitors. Best of all, you can leave the Sanctuary assured that all of the animals will be safely and lovingly cared for, thanks to our no-kill promise. And, of course, we'd love to talk with you about our adoptable pets and adoption process!

Here are some photos of our Ashford Sanctuary (located at 46 Floeting Road, Ashford). We hope you will visit sometime soon!



The Sanctuary in its finest holiday dress!



Volunteer Kristen Brierley comforts Casey. When he arrived at the Sanctuary, he was sick, scared and exhausted. Today he's healthy and in a wonderful home.



Gratuitous cuteness!



OC donor Barbara Erskine visits the Sanctuary and gets a special cuddle from Frankie.



Sanctuary dogs Johnny and Hera enjoy a chew session together.



Staff meetings at the Sanctuary are always a pleasure. Lego is providing pillow services to OC Program Director Stephanie Montemerlo.



Lucy playing in the snow.



Chloe is waiting for you to join her on her couch.



Before moving to the Valerie Friedman Program Center in Manchester and opening the Ashford Sanctuary, Our Companions was entirely housed in the basement of CEO Susan Linker's home. The location was practical and economical for the growing organization. For nearly a decade, Our Companions operated on a shoestring budget, and professional office and meeting space was a low priority compared to providing essential services such as adoptions, feral cat programs and canine behavioral training.

The office furnishings at that time reflected this, consisting of a motley assortment of well-worn desks, a mish-mash of tables and second-hand chairs. The furnishings, along with the headquarters' being located in the basement of a residence, did not convey the strong sense of professionalism that the staff possessed and projected in public.

After relocating OC's "World Headquarters" to the 6,000-square-foot Program Center, Our Companions finally had plenty of space – in a well-lit, newly remodeled building – to administer the many programs and services they had been providing for years in cramped quarters. However, the facility still lacked furniture to complement the beautiful new space. A call went out to volunteers and supporters, seeking donations of office furniture; and while staff waited patiently and hopefully, it was business as usual – conducted in folding chairs, over plastic folding tables, alongside cardboard boxes housing hundreds of files.

With an eye toward creating a functional and comfortable work space, Susan Linker spoke with longtime volunteer and Member of OC's Board of Directors, Kim Zimmermann. For many years Kim has conducted business with John Watts Associates, a contract furniture dealer based in East Hartford. On Kim's referral, Susan called Michael Prestash at John Watts Associates, who generously invited her to come and take whatever she needed. Susan and the Our Companions staff gratefully and excitedly accepted their offer.

John Watts Associates furnished the Program Center with many high quality pieces, including a stunning solid wood conference table with matching chairs, several desks, and file cabinets – a gift totaling approximately \$70,000. According to Susan, "The furniture helps us not only to look more professional but for the staff to feel more professional."

Our Companions has returned to John Watts Associates on two more occasions to request additional items and they were graciously provided. "The partners of John Watts Associates are all members of this community and we want to do whatever we can to help," says Michael Prestash.

In-kind contributions – such as office furniture – are donations of goods or services (rather than money) that, if not donated, would otherwise have to be purchased by the organization. "We want to acknowledge John Watts Associates for their exceptional generosity," says Susan. "Our Companions likely never would have been able to purchase the quality of furniture that they provided. These gifts will be utilized, admired and appreciated by staff, volunteers and visitors for many years to come."



OC Board member Kim Zimmermann, who is herself an artist, has worked with artists and designers in creating professional and stunning office spaces. She brought her experience and talent to OC's Program Center and provided the artwork and design elements for the 6,000-square-foot facility.



Sign proudly displayed in the Valerie Friedman Program Center Lobby.

Our Companions is constantly in need of a variety of goods for both the Program Center and the Ashford Sanctuary. Can you help with any of the following?

Ongoing Needs

Cat food - Dry and canned food for our feral cat programs.

Supplies for the Sanctuary - A list of daily consumable supplies is on the Our Companions website, www.OurCompanions.org/GetInvolved.

Cars - Did you know that you can donate your used car to support OC? We partner with V-DAC, a vehicle donation program that assists individuals in donating their cars to charity. Visit www.v-dac.com to learn more.

Wish List Items

The Ashford Sanctuary is in need of:

- Small upholstered chairs for cats and volunteers to sit and snuggle
- Large climbing trees and scratching posts for cats
- Radios/CD players so the animals can enjoy relaxing music
- Humidifiers
- Floor mats

- Shelving
- Outdoor and gardening supplies

These and many other items can be purchased directly from Amazon and will be shipped to Our Companions.

Visit www.OurCompanions.org/GetInvolved/ Amazon Wish List for more information.



Keeping the Peace

by Andrea Dobras

Managing the Addition of a New Kitten to a Household with an Existing Feline

I'm sure we're not much different. Like mine, your heart melts with the sight of a kitten; their tiny paws, big blue eyes and that hilarious kitten dance that no one in their right mind can possibly resist. I want to put one in my pocket and bring it home right now, too. Although your love for a new kitten seems to be boiling over, the other (feline) members of your family may not feel exactly the same way, so make sure you give the decision and commitment full consideration.

While I wish you a very easy transition, here are some tips to help your established cat adjust to your new (much younger, much more energetic, and much more curious) addition.

Things to Consider – Sex, Age, Size and Quantity

You may have the best luck with a member of the opposite sex that is younger and smaller in size (pretty easy if we're just talking kittens). If you prefer to have the same sex, two females are slightly less risky than two males due to the territorial nature of male cats. If you have a senior cat at home, you may want to consider a pair of kittens versus just one. Kittens are balls of energy (curtain-climbing terrors) and often seek out a playmate to help get that energy out of their system. If you don't have other animals or children to help with the kitten's constant desire to play, your older feline is likely to feel the brunt of this tiny tornado.

The Oh So Important Proper Transition

One of the most challenging things I used to face as an adoption volunteer was helping people to see the importance of a slow and

proper transition. I understand your excitement to see how the cats will get along, but trust me; it's so much easier to do it properly the first time than to try to repair a damaged, rushed relationship.

Proper transitions mean starting your new kitten off in a single room. Do scent exchanges between the kitten and other cat(s) by taking items of one cat and giving it to the other (and vice versa), so that they can smell each other before ever laying eyes on one another. Next, proceed by doing a room swap so that they can further explore each other's areas and smells (still without seeing each other). Once everyone seems to be fairly receptive, you can try a brief encounter with no contact. This can be done using a baby gate, a cat carrier or through a window. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

You want to make sure you are rewarding the positive behavior. This means that when the two cats are together, you are showing both lots of love, affection and playtime. You want them to associate togetherness with happiness. If one begins to act up, quietly and calmly stop the affection, rewards or treats and walk away. It's important that they realize that the fun stops if they act up.

Now you're ready for a short, supervised introduction. It's normal for cats to growl, hiss or puff up. You want to show them that they are safe and loved. If they start to display signs of aggression, simply return them to their separate areas and try again tomorrow. Ideally, the repetition of this step will allow you to keep everyone happily out together for longer periods of time. You can always return



the kitten to his/her transition room during the day while you are out of the house if you are uneasy about leaving them alone together.

This process can take several days to several weeks, so please be patient.

Minimizing Ripples

Cats are territorial and do not like change. It's important to keep your routine as normal as possible. You don't want to cause upset to the resident cat during meal time or bathroom time, so it's always best to have two litter boxes, two food stations and two water bowls even after the complete transition. Once the cats are sharing the same space, you may still find it useful to feed in separate areas or rooms. If you notice that your resident cat is showing signs of distress and can't seem to normalize, creating a separate area or room that is only his/hers will offer a place of respite.

Need more advice on transitioning? Don't hesitate to contact Our Companions if you hit a bump along the way.

References

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Andrea Dobras is an Our Companions Board member and one of our animal welfare professionals. She specializes in the placement of cats with FIV. In this regular feature, she helps others with the most complex cat conundrums.

The Scoop

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of *The Scoop*, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org.



When I remember Phineas, our 14-year-old orange tiger-striped cat, I recall memories of him as a kitten snuggled in my jacket during weekly road trips to visit mom. I remember how Phineas loved licking Fudgsicles®, stealing chicken fingers right off our plates, and retrieving plastic ping pong balls.

I also remember Phineas at the end of his life. Not because of his battle with inoperable nasal cancer but because in spite of it he continued living every day to the fullest. Always content as an indoor cat, Phineas suddenly began scratching at the sliders to go outside, so we took him on a harness and leash. Some days we walked deep into the woods, other days he simply lounged in a pile of crunchy fallen leaves with the late afternoon sun beaming on his face. Phineas feasted on a bounty of various canned food and an endless supply of tasty treats. When the time came for the difficult final decision, we let him go wrapped in a special fleece blanket, surrounded by his human loved ones and two favorite catnip stuffed dinosaur toys.

Quality of life made as physically comfortable and pain free as possible during the final stages of an incurable disease or condition is what palliative care, or hospice is all about. Veterinary hospice is not a specific place but is a care program of medical and support services designed to assist pets and their owners through a period of time – typically days, weeks or months – as the end of life (via natural death or euthanasia) approaches. Although human hospice is widely recognized, the field of veterinary hospice has been slowly gaining

acceptance as an important component of the human animal bond. The American Veterinary Medical Association approved its first Veterinary Hospice guidelines in 2001, with revisions made in 2007, to ensure a number of issues are addressed appropriately. In 2010, the American Association of Feline Practitioners released a full position statement in support of Veterinary Hospice Care for Cats. A nationwide hospice program listing can be found on the International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC) website at www.iaahpc.org. If your veterinarian does not offer hospice services they may work with you to locate an appropriate referral. Keep in mind that mobile veterinary clinics provide in-home euthanasia even if they do not participate in an official hospice program.

Pet hospice patients with life-limiting situations that no longer respond to treatment may continue living at home and receive care from loved ones with the assistance of a veterinary hospice team. In their own home environment family members have an opportunity to adjust to their pet's condition, prepare for their eventual passing, and learn coping mechanisms throughout the caretaking and grieving processes. The team consists of veterinarians and veterinary technicians available on call for urgent needs including pain management and in-home euthanasia. This is especially beneficial for cats who often suffer extreme stress within a hospital setting. The care team delivers personalized education for attending to the pet's ongoing medical needs at home which may include administering oral and or injectable medications, nutritional supplements,



Phineas sunning himself in the leaves.

subcutaneous (under the skin) fluids and information on proper nutrition and hygiene. Resources are provided for specialized equipment such as heated beds, waterproof blankets, and assistive devices for walking or lifting – harnesses, braces, carts, and ramps.

Pet loss and grief counseling is offered by the veterinary team or referred to mental health professionals skilled in pet hospice. Complementary veterinary medicine- acupuncture, massage therapy and pet physical therapy – may be advised to relieve pain and stress. Some pets may gain return to a good quality of life for many months, however the hospice focus remains on palliative care, not curing. Veterinary hospice provides a loving and gradual transition for you and your pet, however if your pet is suffering, experiencing unmanageable pain, or is otherwise not suited for hospice care, then timely euthanasia is the best gift you can give them at the end of their life.

A friend of mine once said, “Everyone gets a turn. We just don't know how or when we're going to die. We need to live and enjoy every day.” And so it is for our animal companions too.



Technically Speaking is written by Certified Veterinary Technician, Lyn T. Garson, to address basic information on animal health issues and how they needn't be barriers to adopting a great pet.

Technically speaking

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of Technically Speaking, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org.



We often receive questions on how to prepare dogs for the loss of a canine companion or to help them through the grieving process. People want to know what they can do to comfort their pets and whether bringing another dog into the home is a good coping strategy. I recently sat down with Our Companions Canine Operations Director Marie Joyner to get her advice.

Is there anything I can do to help my dog prepare for the loss of his canine companion?

In any multi-dog household, it is important to spend time with each dog by himself. Taking walks with one dog at a time or doing special activities such as playing fetch or hide and seek gives your pet the opportunity to experience individual attention, which is beneficial for dogs in general. Separating the dogs at times, such as when one needs to go to the vet, allows each dog to become comfortable being alone.

What can I do to help my dog through the grieving process?

Dogs can show their grief in different ways, but they are resilient; with love, support and patience, you can help them through this loss. What is most important for your pet at this time is maintaining consistency and stability at home. Stick to a normal routine for your dog. Feed him, walk him and play with him at the same time each day.

Pay special attention to petting, grooming, and even training your dog – anything that you can do together. Take long walks in new places, try different activities and reinforce positive training. Positive training is particularly helpful during this time because it can strengthen the bond between you and your dog.



A close relationship between pets can be a blessing and challenge when one passes away.

With the loss of a pet, the social order in your home changes and your existing dog will need to figure out his new position. Your dog will look to you for leadership to help him understand his role and this is where the positive training can assist you both in establishing a new order.

Should I add another dog to our family for companionship?

Bringing a new dog into the home is really an individual decision and may differ for every family. You and your family need to be ready to take on the responsibility of another pet and ensure a smooth transition for each dog in your home. Adding another dog can put stress on you and your dog, so it is important to feel that

you are in a good position to help him through the transition.

What people may not realize is that a dog can adjust to life without a canine companion, and in some cases, he might even be happier. We have seen dogs blossom after losing a furry companion. Again, each situation is unique and you should do what is best for your family, including your dog.

Our Companions offers many behavioral resources to the community. If you have specific questions or would just like some advice on your particular situation, please call 860-242-9999.



Our Companions Canine Operations Director, Marie Joyner, receives questions every day about dogs and their behavioral issues. Marie's Den answers some of the more commonly asked questions.

Marie's Den

To submit a question for consideration in a future edition of Marie's Den, call us at 860-242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail editor@ourcompanions.org.

Do you have an idea for a future article in Our Companions News?

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Cleo (left)

Say hello to Cleo! Cleo is a stunning and absolutely lovely three-year-old female Treeing Walker Coonhound with lots of energy! Cleo enjoys playing with her squeaky toys, loves playing with her people but, if they aren't available, she will toss her toy up and play by herself! She is also a proud graduate of Companions I classes where she learned her beginning skills of "sit," "lay down," "come," and walking well on leash. She has now even learned how to roll over!

She would love to find a home with active adults (or possibly an active house that includes teenage children). She would prefer to be the only dog, and really needs to have a fenced-in yard. If you are looking for a wonderful companion and exercise buddy, Cleo fits the bill! To learn more about Cleo, please call Our Companions at 860-242-9999 ext. 302 or e-mail daryl@ourcompanions.org.



Boomer (right)

Boomer is an exceptionally charming and gentle kitty – and very easy to fall in love with! He is laid back and quiet, and such an undemanding and wonderful companion. He loves to be petted and is even happy to be held while he receives a nail trimming. Even his meow is soft and well-mannered! This handsome five-year-old has the most expressive eyes and beautiful face and is eager to find his forever home.

Boomer is FIV-positive, but has no health issues as a result. FIV is a feline-only virus, most commonly transmitted from cat to cat through deep bite wounds. The risk of transmission to FIV-negative cats is minimal if the cats aren't prone to fighting. For more information on this wonderful boy, please contact Donna at 860-242-9999 x 302 or Donna@ourcompanions.org.